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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

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National Intelligence Council

NIC-00919/87

2 March 1987

MEMORANDUM FOR: Acting Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: Robert E. Blackwell
Acting National Intelligence Officer for USSR

SUBJECT: February Warning and Forecast Report

1. Soviet Asian Policy After the Vladivostok Speech

A. Discussion: DIA led off the discussion by noting that, despite Gorbachev's speech in Vladivostok last July, what we have seen thus far suggests Moscow's revised approach to Asia is more a change of style than of substance. Moscow, though professing a willingness to cultivate better ties with all of non-Communist East Asia, still appears unwilling to pay any significant price. There have been no significant concessions to Japan and the offers to the Chinese -- to withdraw troops from Mongolia, engage in MBFR type negotiations about troops elsewhere along the border, and settle the long-standing river border dispute along the main navigation channel -- are not as forthcoming as they seem. For example, DIA thinks that the announced Soviet troop withdrawal from Mongolia will be a sham like the recent withdrawal from Afghanistan because Moscow is reorganizing its forces there and probably will eventually be able to withdraw some personnel without suffering any real degradation in overall combat capability.

DIA believes the current Soviet effort to persuade us that the USSR is serious about getting out of Afghanistan is aimed mainly at dividing the coalition that supports the resistance and that Moscow still has not decided to settle for anything less than a full-fledged Communist regime in Afghanistan. Elsewhere in Asia, the Soviets have taken advantage of South Pacific dissatisfaction over declining levels of Western aid to establish a new fishing foothold in Vanuatu and tried to shore up relations with India, but there are no signs that Moscow is putting any real pressure on Vietnam to come to terms with China on the Cambodian issue and the Soviets continue to cultivate North Korea at the expense of the Chinese.

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CIA/SOVA agreed that there had not yet been much real evidence of substantive change in Moscow's approach to most of Asia, but thinks that the evidence is not all in, particularly vis-a-vis China. Moscow may now be much more prepared than it was in the past to offer up real concessions to the Chinese, both on the question of troop withdrawals from Mongolia and on the settlement of the long-standing boundary dispute. ANIO/USSR agrees. ANIO/USSR believes that the Gorbachev regime's Asia policy is still in its formative stages, and we may yet see more significant substantive changes.

B. Warning: Because of the higher priority Gorbachev attaches to handling relations with the US, he has not yet made the kind of wholesale personnel changes that are necessary to initiate and implement more intelligent policy approaches toward Asia. Once this happens, however, evolution toward a more active and effective Soviet Asian policy will be facilitated.

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2. Gorbachev's Human Rights Strategy

A. Discussion: The community concurred on key points of a presentation by State/INR:

- There was little change in Gorbachev's first year, but key elements of a new strategy have now begun to fall into place: a limited amnesty for certain categories of political prisoners, a revision and clarification of judicial procedures and the criminal code, and changes in emigration procedures that could produce a modest increase in emigration (up to a few thousand a year) over the next several years.
- There are both domestic and international factors behind this new strategy. Gorbachev wants to enlist intellectuals in the effort to revitalize Soviet society and discredit his political opponents. But the regime also anticipates a beneficial impact on foreign opinion and the dividends for Soviet diplomacy that will thereby accrue.
- We are in the initial stages of a lengthy process that could produce further, gradual amelioration in Soviet human rights policies. It remains to be seen whether Gorbachev will succeed in eliminating dissent as a political problem and how severely these policies will increase Gorbachev's political risk.

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B. Warning: While these steps have domestic causes, the regime clearly intends to use them to more effectively play the international human rights game and launch a more aggressive counteroffensive against Western attacks on Soviet abuses. The United States needs to review its own strategy to take into account the new Soviet tactics. ANIO/USSR believes that, without an effort to develop a coordinated Western response to these trends, the United States risks being pulled along by what is shaping up to be a positive assessment among the European allies that lacks balance.

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3. Gorbachev's Political Position

A. Discussion: The community agrees that the January Central Committee plenum dramatized the scope of the changes Gorbachev wants but underscored the continuing high-level resistance he faces from colleagues in the Politburo and Central Committee. As presented by State/INR:

- Though he advanced allies to non-voting membership and to the Secretariat, Gorbachev did not get the additions to voting membership (Yakovlev or Yeltsin, for instance) that he almost certainly wanted.
- We are seeing a "radicalization" of Gorbachev. He is putting himself in front of the rest of his colleagues and risks alienating too many key constituencies at once for his own political health. Issues of how to manage party affairs and economic reform are key issues on which there is probably disagreement in the Politburo.
- Events surrounding the plenum reinforce earlier indications that second secretary Ligachev, while a supporter of key components of Gorbachev's agenda, is acting as a brake on the pace of change.

Within this general framework, there are continuing differences within the community over his strength and staying power. Some analysts believe that Gorbachev is essentially stalemated until he can make further inroads against Politburo and Central Committee opponents. Others believe this view underestimates the strength of his position -- they believe that Gorbachev still has the initiative and that key indicators of a potential setback -- such as a retreat from "glasnost" -- have yet to show up.

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B. Warning: Unless Gorbachev backs off (unlikely), we anticipate continuing leadership turmoil. As he broadens his agenda to include ever more controversial ideas, he will need increasing political power to overcome the opposition. We believe the chances of a head-on confrontation between Gorbachev and his political opponents comparable to that between Khrushchev and the "anti-party group" in 1957 have increased. Some would put the odds as high as 30% in the next year, while others would put the figure lower than that. We believe that policy toward the United States is an issue in the leadership, but not the main one. A/NIO/USSR [REDACTED] believes that, in the event of any showdown, Gorbachev's opponents would attempt to use his course of active diplomatic engagement with the Reagan Administration against him.

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Outside Attendees

Bob Baraz
 Igor Belousovitch
 Jim Collins
 Judy Deane

[REDACTED]

Laura Morgan

[REDACTED]

S. Ploss
 William Stearman
 John Van Oudenaren
 Samuel Watson

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Inside Attendees

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